



October 2000

## **EPA Fact Sheet**

### **Blackbird Mine Update:**

### **Cobalt, Idaho**

#### **Wildfires Delay Cleanup Schedule**

Due to the Clear Creek fire, no hazardous waste cleanup work was performed at the site during the spring and summer of this year. However, work on the Bevan property is planned to resume this fall. The following work will take place next year during the 2001 construction season.

-All remaining contaminated soil along the banks of Panther Creek will be removed: the Cobalt Townsite and Noranda pastures, the Sillings and Fernandez properties, and an area where Panther Creek meets Napias Creek.

Annual water quality monitoring in creeks affected by the mine was performed in the spring and was performed again in September of this year to measure the contaminant levels. Compared to past years, the levels of copper and cobalt in the creeks have been substantially reduced.

#### **What's Next**

EPA will evaluate areas that still may pose a risk to human health and the environment. These areas include the West Fork Tailings Impoundment, sediments and contaminated soils remaining around the site, and Bucktail Creek below the 7000 Dam. Other areas identified in the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) process will also be evaluated. EPA will determine whether additional cleanup actions are needed, and if so, these actions will be the final actions for the site.

The final proposed cleanup plan for Blackbird Mine will be issued in the fall of 2001 or early 2002. There will be a public meeting and a formal comment period, and you will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan during that time. EPA will make the final cleanup decision in early 2002, after considering public comments.

#### **Background**

Blackbird Mine is an inactive mine approximately 20 miles west of Salmon, Idaho, in the Salmon National Forest in east central Idaho, Lemhi County. Cobalt, gold, silver, and copper ore were extracted from underground and open pit mining operations. The mining operations left an open pit (Blacktail Pit), several miles of underground workings, waste rock piles and a tailings disposal impoundment.

The environmental concerns at the site are primarily caused by the release of metals into Meadow, Blackbird, Big Deer and Panther Creeks. Dissolved metals, such as cobalt, copper and iron, are released when snowmelt and rainwater seep through the mine wastes. Metals and arsenic in soil, waste rock and tailings can also contaminate streams when mine wastes are eroded by storms or snowmelt. Contaminated soil, sediments and tailings were released from the Blackbird Mine site during high water flows from thunderstorms and snowmelt. Investigations show that flood irrigation also spread contaminated material along Panther Creek in the overbank soil as well as in pastures. The highest concentrations of arsenic were found from the Cobalt Townsite down to Napias Creek. Arsenic concentrations generally decreased downstream of Napias Creek to the Salmon River.

In 1993, EPA proposed the site to its National Priorities List (NPL) for further investigation and cleanup. EPA reached agreement with Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) to investigate the contamination and evaluate the cleanup options for the major sources at the mine. This investigation is known as a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study. In 1998, the PRPs did cleanup work at the Panther Creek Inn. The PRPs, referred to as the Blackbird Mine Site Group, are Noranda Mining Inc., M.A. Hanna Co. and Intalco Corporation (formerly Alumet Corporation). The work by the PRPs is being performed under EPA oversight, and in consultation with the State of Idaho, U.S. Forest Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

(Continued in next column)

### For More Information

Copies of reports that support the removals and cleanups relating to the Blackbird Mine are available at the following locations:

Salmon Public Library  
204 Main Street  
Salmon, ID

Panther Creek Inn  
Cobalt, ID

U. S. EPA  
Idaho Operations Office  
1435 N. Orchard  
Boise, ID

U. S. EPA  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
7th Floor Records Center  
Seattle, WA

### Questions

If you have any questions, please contact:

**Fran Allans**, EPA Project Manager, at  
**208-378-5775**

**Dave Tomten**, EPA Project Manager, at  
**208-378-5763**

**Jeanne O'Dell**, Community Involvement  
Coordinator  
at **206-553-6919** or toll free at  
**1-800-424-4372**

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the numbers above.



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**BLACKBIRD MINE**  
*Cobalt, Idaho*